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BELIEFS, RITES, AND CUSTOMS OF THE JEWS,
CONNECTED WITH DEATH, BURIAL, AND
MOURNING.

(AS ILLUSTRATED BY THE BIBLE AND LATER JEWISH
LITERATURE.)

IV.

As the soul is leaving the body, a threefold call is heard from Heaven, ‘O son of Adam, hast thou abandoned the world, or has the world abandoned thee; hast thou gathered of the world, or has the world gathered of thee; hast thou slain the world, or has the world slain thee?’” (*Muhamm. Eschat.*, ch. viii.)

In this moment the sound occasioned by the divorce of soul from body reaches from one end of the world to the other, but none hears it (*T.B. Joma*, 20b; *Pirge R. Eliezer*, ch. xxxiv.). It is stated, however, in *מסכת יצירת העולם* (*Beth Ha-Mid.*, Jellinek, I., p. 153) that the sound is heard by the cock alone.

As the soul of the Jew wings its flight to the Soul of the universe, those present rend their garments, and express their resignation to the will of God by reverently exclaiming, “ברוך יין האמת,” “Blessed be the true Judge!”

When the last breath has left the body, and no trace of life can be discerned, the eyes of the dead are reverently closed, generally by the eldest son, but, failing him, by the nearest relative (*Zohar*, Ed. Krotoschin פ' *שלוח לך*, 169a). In *מעבר יעקב*, 128a, it says that it is but right that this office of love should be performed by the heir, and that the act in itself is beneficial to the deceased). It is distinctly stated however, that one is

"guilty of death," if one closes the eyes before one is fully satisfied that life is wholly extinct (T.B. *Semach*. I.), or even עם יציאת חנפש, i.e., while the soul is in the act of emerging from the body (*Mish. Shabb.* xxiii. 4), as seems to have been usual among the Arabs. This custom is reputed to be one of great antiquity. Thus there is supposed to be an allusion to it already in Gen. xliv. 4, where God tells Jacob in a vision: "Joseph shall put his hands upon thine eyes" (Nachmanides, *Comm. in loco*). It is likewise not confined to the Jews. The practice was observed by the ancient Greeks and Romans (cf. Hom. *Il.* XI. 453; *Odys.* XI. 426; xxiv. 296; Eurip., *Phoen.* 1465 and *Hec.*, 430; Virg. *Aen.*, IX. 487; Ovid, *Heroid.* I. 102; Euseb., *Hist. Eccl.* VII. ch. xxii. § 9). It represents one of the directions given by Bar Hebraeus in his well-known *Book of Conduct* (*Die Canones Jacob's von Edessa*, Ed. C. Kayser, p. 152); and it also prevails among the Egyptians. "When the rattles in the throat, or other symptoms, show that a man is at the point of death, an attendant (his wife or some other person) turns him round to place his face in the direction of Mekkah and closes his eyes." (*Modern Egyptians*, Stanley Lane-Poole, 1875, II. ch. xxviii.)

The "motif" of this custom is explained in מעבר יבך 128a). As man is supposed to behold the Shechina in the moment when he expires, it is not proper that his eyes should be permitted to rest upon a profane object after this divine vision. He is likewise deemed unworthy to obtain a view of yonder sphere, until this world has been completely hidden from his sight. Pliny (*Nat. Hist.* xi. § 150, quoted by Mr. Frazer) also assigns as a reason for the custom, that the dead should be seen for the last time, not by man, but by Heaven. Mr. Frazer, however, is of opinion that its basis is to be sought elsewhere. "The very general practice of closing the eyes of the dead appears to have originated with a similar object (that the ghost might not be able to find his way

back); it was a mode of blindfolding the dead, that he might not see the way by which he was carried to his last home. At the grave where he was to rest for ever, there was, of course, no motive for concealment, hence the Romans, and apparently the Siamese, opened the eyes of the dead man at the funeral pyre, just as we should unbandage the eyes of an enemy after conducting him to his destination. In Nuremberg, the eyes of the corpse were actually bandaged with a wet cloth. In Corea, they put blinkers, or rather blinders, on his eyes; they are made of black silk and are tied with strings at the back of his head. The Jews put a potsherd, and the Russians coins, on each of his eyes. The notion that if the eyes of the dead be not closed his ghost will return to fetch away another of the household still exists in Bohemia, Germany, and England" (*Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, xv. 64ff.).

But while this explanation is no doubt, in the main, the correct one, is it not possible that the Jews, who, as history proves, had a remarkable capacity for spiritualising every heathen usage which they assimilated, may have originally had no other motive in carrying out this practice than that set forth in מעדך יבך? It seems to have been a general belief among the Jews that man was privileged to catch a passing vision of his Creator just as the soul was leaving the body; and we find even Job, when sunk in the slough of despond, breathing a confident hope that he will himself behold God with his own eyes (Job xix. 27). Thus it was only natural that such a people should have considered it sacrilege to suffer anything earthly to be seen by eyes which had once peered beyond the mysterious veil which cannot be riven by the soul of man while it remains in contact with aught that is subject to corruption.

Besides the eyes, the mouth is closed, and the cheek-bones are bound together, to prevent them dropping asunder (T.B. *Semach. I.* and references).

The Bible records an isolated instance of kissing the dead (Gen. 1. 1). But this act of Joseph's was probably due to nothing else but an irresistible impulse of affection. In the *Book of Jubilees* it is recorded that when Rebekah, accompanied by Isaac, found Abraham dead in his bed, the son of the patriarch fell upon his father's face and kissed him. But, of course, there is no historical foundation for this incident. Among the ancient Romans, if not an universal, still it was not an uncommon habit, apparently, to give the dying a last kiss in order to catch the parting breath. The passages from which this is inferred are Cic. *Ver.* V. 45; Virg. *AEn.* IV. 684 (quoted by Becker). There is also some reference (though it is likewise not very distinct) in Lucian, *De Luctu* (Ed. Heitland) § 13, to the custom among the Greeks of a father and mother embracing their departed son ($\pi\epsilon\rhoιχνθεις$ —"flung his arms around" the corpse). The modern Greeks, when bidding farewell to a dead relative, usually imprint a kiss upon the lips of the corpse (*Customs and Lore of Modern Greece*, Rennell Rodd, p. 129). The Copts and the Druses likewise kiss their dead before interment (Vide *Social History of the Races of Mankind*, Featherman, Div. V. 254-482). But the practice does not seem to have been generally popular in ancient times. In the book צָרֵר הַמֹּר, a philosophical and cabballistic commentary on the Pentateuch, quoted by מעבר יבנ (101b) the kiss which Joseph imprinted upon his deceased father is explained as the "kiss of leave-taking," one of the three kinds of kisses recognised as permitted by the law of decency (*Schir. Hasch. Rab.* I. 14), the other two being the kiss of homage and the kiss on meeting those near and dear to one. Hence the author infers from Gen. 1. 1 that it is proper to kiss a dead relative in token of farewell. In *Mid. Lekach Tob*, or *Pesikta Sutarta* (Ed. Buber) I. 121a, Joseph's kiss is likewise described as גשיקה של פרידה. For examples of this latter type of kiss see 1 Kings xix. 20, where Elisha asks permission of Elijah to go and kiss his father and mother before

consecrating himself to the ministry of God ; and *Acts xx. 37f*, where the people fall upon the neck of Paul on the eve of his departure from their midst, and kiss him. מעבר יבך itself remarks that when one's son or daughter dies one is not allowed to kiss them, notwithstanding the instance cited above of a son embracing his deceased father. We find the same view expressed in *ספר החסידים*, paragraph 236. And there are no other examples of such a practice in post-Biblical Jewish Literature.

An hour after death has taken place, the corpse is reverently lifted, while straw is spread under it, a prayer (for the text of which *vide* *יבך*, p. 55), being recited the while. The feet of the dead are turned towards the door, and a black cloth is stretched over the body (*T.B. Shabb. 151a*; cf. *Sirach xxxviii. 16*, "And then cover his body according to the custom"). The ancient Greeks also placed the dead on a couch in the same posture, and among the Romans, the corpse was laid out on a state-bed in the atrium with its feet turned towards the door. (*Vide* *Seyffert's Dict. of Class. Antiqs.* Ed. Nettleship and Sandys.)

I come now to the ancient mode of announcing that a death had occurred in a household. This was done by the sound of the Shouphar and work was at once temporarily suspended, so that all might be enabled to participate in the obsequies (*T.B. Moed. Kat.* 276). The Jews had great reluctance to communicating evil tidings to those concerned (Cf. *Prov. x. 10*; *xvii. 27*; and see *Zunz, Zur Geschichte und Literatur*, p. 308.) Thus, when Rabbi Jehuda ha-Nâsi was dying at Sepphoris, the inhabitants said: He who brings us the news that Rabbi is no more, shall be put to death. Bar Kappara looked down from a window attired as a mourner, with garments rent and head covered, and spoke thus: "Brethren, the strong and the feeble have had a contest for the possession of the Tables of the Law, and the strong have asserted their claim successfully and have taken the Tables unto themselves." Thereupon the people burst forth: "Rabbi

is dead!" "You have declared it," he answered, "not I" (T. B. *Kethub.* 104a; T. J. *Kilaim* ix. 3; *Kohel. Rab.* vii. 12). Likewise when Rab Kahana was dangerously ill, the Rabbis sent Rabbi Joshua bar Rab Idi to him, and he found Rab Kahana dead. He returned with rent garments and dissolved in tears, when the Rabbis asked, "He is dead, is he not?" "You have announced the fact," he replied, "not I" (T.B. *Pesach.* 3b).

While on this subject, I may mention another peculiar usage of the Jews supposed to be connected therewith, which is observed on the occasion of a death and which has been adopted by other nations, between some of whom there is no ethnological affinity. Hence it is impossible to trace its original birth-place. All the water in the house at the time when the death occurs, is immediately poured out, and the same is done in a few of the adjoining dwellings on either side (בקור חולמים ס' L. M. Landshuth, xxx.). Various attempts have been made to explain this practice satisfactorily; but in the multitude of reasons there is confusion.

The Kolbo offers two alternative explanations of the afore-mentioned custom, thereby throwing doubt upon the veracity of either.

(1.) As it is objectionable to communicate bad news to any one directly, water is poured out to make manifest to the neighbours and passers-by that a death has taken place.

(2.) It symbolises the fact that the Angel of Death cleanses his dripping knife in water after it has been steeped in gall, and all water is poured away in case he may dip the bloodstained weapon into any vessel that comes across his path, and so scatter death broadcast (See also מעבר יבך, 111b).

Mr. Frazer, a recognised authority on such matters, thinks the practice is to be traced to a fear "lest the ghost should fall in and be drowned."

In support of Mr. Frazer's plausible theory, we may note

that in Haute Bretagne, as well as in Basse Bretagne, when there is a death in the house, the water which is found in the vessels is thrown out for fear lest the soul of the deceased should be drowned in it (*Coutumes de la Haute Bretagne*, P. Sébillot, 155f). Also Mr. Andrew Lang tells us ("Folklore of France," in *Folklore Record*, I. 101) that "the water in the house must be poured out of pitchers and glasses (as among the Jews), lest the flying soul should drown itself" (Cf. Souchè, *Croyances, Présages et Traditions Divers*, p. 5). In Germany, the water and milk which may be left in uncovered vessels at the moment when a death has taken place, are immediately thrown out. This is done, according to some, because the departed soul, on its return to wash off its pollution after having discarded its earthen envelope, might be drowned; according to others, because one should not expose one's self to the risk of taking a draught of the sins of the deceased (Liebrecht, *Zur Volkskunde*, p. 350).

That there was a current belief that the soul might perform a lustration after it had passed out of its ephemeral frame is shown by the following. In some parts of Bohemia, after a death, the water-bath is emptied, because, if the ghost happened to bathe in it and anyone drank of it afterwards, he would be a dead man in the year (James G. Frazer in *Journal of Anthropol. Inst.* xv. 64ff). There is a German tradition to the same effect (Liebrecht, *Zur Volkskunde*, p. 350). It is likewise an Indian burial custom, that after the death of a person, milk and water are placed in an earthen vessel in the open air, and the relatives exclaim: "Departed one, here bathe" (the commentary adds) "and here drink" (*Ibid.* p. 351).

In some cases another reason altogether different is assigned for the practice, whilst in others, no explanation seems to be forthcoming, it having possibly been lost in process of transmission from one generation to another.

"In many parts of Germany, in modern Greece and in Cyprus, water is poured out behind the corpse as it is being

carried from the house, in the belief that if the ghost returns, he will not be able to cross it. Sometimes, by night, the Germans pour holy water before the door, the ghost is then thought to stand and whimper on the further side" (James G. Frazer in *Journal of Anthropol. Inst.*, xv. 64ff). A somewhat confusing explanation of the custom as observed in Cyprus, is given in "Notes on Greek Folklore" (E. M. Edwards) in *Folklore Journal*, II. 170: "In Cyprus, after the funeral has passed out of the street, they pour from a large vessel the water which it contains, and then throw down the vessel. This custom is referred to the basins of lustral water, 'χέρυβα,' which were placed at the doors of the house in which there was a deceased person, to be used by those who had touched the body, but with the Cypriotes it is thought to be for the refreshing of the soul that has left the body, or according to another version, for washing off the blood from the sword of the Archangel Michael, who is supposed to be invisible after having taken the soul of the departed." In Corfu, the poor people throw water from the windows, when a funeral has passed by (*Customs and Lore of Modern Greece*, Rennell Rodd, p. 124.) Similarly, in some parts of Calabria (Castrovellari and Nocara) and of Germany, all the vessels are emptied at death (James G. Frazer, *Journal of Anthropol. Inst.*, xv. 64ff). That the practice was also prevalent in ancient Greece is shown by an inscription found in Iulis (Tzia) which prohibits it: *μηδε τὸ ὕδωρ ἐκχεῖν* (Dittenberger, *Syllog. Inscrif. Graec.* II., No. 468). Among the Polynesians, "as soon as the corpse was committed to its last resting-place, the mourners selected five old cocoa-nuts, which were successively opened, and the water poured out on the ground" (*Anthropological Religion*, Max Müller, p. 278). "In Burma, when the coffin is being carried out, every vessel in the house that contains water is emptied" (James G. Frazer, *Journal of Anthropol. Inst.* xv. 64ff). In the north-east of Scotland, all the milk in the house is poured out on the ground (*Folklore of North-East Scotland*, W.

Gregor, p. 206). The same custom is observed in parts of England, and thus the vulgar expression "kicking the bucket" is explained, evidently deriving its origin from the act of turning over the pail and upsetting the water (Liebrecht, *Zur Volkskunde*, p. 351).

Furthermore, an examination of versions of the custom in vogue among various races, seems to point to its possible derivation from four other causes than that suggested by Mr. Frazer.

1. All water remaining in open vessels after a death had occurred was regarded as unclean, and people were afraid of being contaminated by it.

2. It represented an offering in honour of the dead.

3. It is a survival of the practice of providing food for the departed spirit, in anticipation that it would return in quest of nourishment.

4. It is a symbol of the pouring-out of the soul before God.

With reference to the first, we know from numerous passages in the Bible the precautions taken by the ancient Hebrews against being defiled by contact with the dead, as well as the remedial measures necessary in the event of such a mishap. But it is a special passage in the book of Numbers (xix. 14f) which, according to some authorities forms the basis of the custom referred to above. "This is the law when a man dieth in a tent: Every one that cometh into the tent and every one that is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days. And every open vessel, which hath no covering bound upon it is unclean" (*Vide Buxtorf, Synagoga Judaica*, ch. xxxiii.). Even modern Jews, as they leave the graveyard, wash their hands, while reciting some verses of Scripture. In ancient Greece and Rome, the mourner had to be cleansed by lustration from the contaminating presence of death. "At the door of the Greek house of mourning was set the water-vessel (*ἀρδάνιον*), that those who had been within might sprinkle themselves and be clean; while the

mourners returning from a Roman funeral aspersed with water, and stepping over fire, were by this double process made pure" (*Vide Tylor, Primitive Culture*, ii. 398). In the former case, the water had to be brought from another house, in which no dead body lay (*Poll.* viii. 65). "In modern Greece, Cappadocia and Crete, persons returning from a funeral wash their hands. In Samoa, they wash their faces in hot water. In ancient India, it was enough merely to touch water. In China, on the fifth day after a death, the mourners wash their eyes and sprinkle their faces three times with water. The Wends of Geiszlitz, make a point of passing through running water as they return from a burial; in winter, if the river is frozen they break the ice in order to wade through the water" (James G. Frazer, *Journ. of Anthropol. Inst.*, xv. 64ff.). It is a Malagasy custom that after a funeral the mourners all wash their dress, or at least dip a portion of it in running water ("Malagasy Folklore, etc.", James Sibra, Junr., in *Folklore Record* II.). Among a number of South African tribes, whose manners, customs, superstitions, and religions have been described by the Rev. J. Macdonald (*Journ. of Anthropol. Inst.*, xix.), "those who handled the body were unclean, and had to bathe in running water before associating with other men, or partaking of food." And Professor Max Müller relates of the Indians (*Anthropological Religion*, p. 254), that "when they have come to a place where there is standing water, they dive once, throw up a handful of water, pronounce the name of the deceased and his family (Gotra), go out from the water, put on new garments, wring the others once, spread them out towards the north, and then sit down till they see the stars or the sun." It also appears that in parts of Scotland, the chairs, etc., in the house are sprinkled with water, and the clothes of the dead are treated in like manner (W. Gregor, *Folklore of N.E. Scotland*, p. 206).

Thus we see how wide-spread is the belief that the occurrence of a death in a house tends to promote general uncleanness.

As to the possibility of the emptying of the water representing a libation to the dead, or an offering on its behalf, with the object of assisting the soul of the departed towards beatitude, the sacrifices to the manes are familiar to all students of classical history. To the Jews, however, such sacrifices were strictly forbidden. Embodied in the declaration to be recited by the Israelite who should be privileged to enter the Promised Land, and to fulfil the law of tithe, was the following:—"I have not given thereof to the dead; I have hearkened to the voice of the Lord my God; I have done according to all that thou hast commanded me" (Deut. xxvi. 14; cf. *Book of Jubilees*, c. xxii.). Yet there are some traces of the violation of this prohibition by the chosen people. Does not the Psalmist, in his succinct poetical history of the Children of Israel, reproach them with having eaten the sacrifices of the dead? (Ps. civ. 27; but possibly the author is thinking of Deut. xxxii. 38.)

That water might have formed part of such sacrifices gains credence from the following:—

In India, "the man who is performing the obsequies, when the body is placed in an urn (after burning), walks three times round the place, turning his left to it, and with a Samî branch sprinkles milk and water over it, reciting a verse, R.V. x. 16, 4. Again, on the day of the new moon after the obsequies, the performer of the expiatory service for the dead pours out a continuous stream of water, reciting a verse, R.V. x. 16, 9" (Max Müller, *Anthropological Religion*, p. 258). If a wife, or one of the chief Gurus (a father or Akârja dies), they pour out water consecrated in such a manner that the dead shall know it to be given to them ("Apastamba: Aphorisms of the Sacred Laws of the Hindus," II. 8—10, in Vol. III. of *Sacred Books of the East*). The custom of giving offerings to the dead lingers, to a similarly slight extent, among the Buddhists. At the interment, after the body is laid in the grave, wrapped in linen, another cloth is placed over it, and the monk takes

hold of the corner of this cloth ; and while another person pours water on the upper end of the corpse, the monk says, " As water rolling down from higher ground, flows over the lower land, so may that which is given in this world benefit (the prētas or) the departed " (Vide *Buddhism, Primitive and Present, in Magadha and in Ceylon*. T. W. Copleston).

On the whole, there is no reliable evidence to support the conjecture that the Jews were accustomed to offer libations to the dead.

On behalf of the assumption that the pouring out of the water is a survival of the widely prevalent custom of providing refreshment for the departed soul, there is certainly more to be said.

It is well known that the ancients imagined that the ghost of the departed would need the same nourishment in its new abode that it had required in its earthly home. Among the Assyrians and Babylonians " it was believed that the spirits of the dead needed sustenance in their new home, and clay vases were accordingly placed in the tombs, some of them filled with dates and grain, others with wine and oil ; but a more bountiful provision was made in the case of water, which, it was thought, was wholesome to drink only when it was fresh and running " (*Social Life among the Assyrians and Babylonians*, A. H. Sayce, Chap. IV.). Among the Arabs, too, " the dead are thirsty rather than hungry, and water and wine are poured upon their graves. Thirst is a subtler appetite than hunger, and therefore more appropriate to the disembodied shades, just as it is from thirst rather than from hunger that the Hebrews, and many other nations, borrow metaphors for spiritual longings and intellectual desires " (*Religion of the Semites*, W. Robertson Smith, p. 217). In India, " one requirement of a burning-ground (Smasāna, the place for burying as well as burning) is that the water should run down from it on all sides " (Max Müller, *Anthropological Religion*, p. 243). When one of the Yes-

dees (a race inhabiting several valleys near Mosul and ancient Nineveh) is at the point of death, "a 'cawal' is called in, who pours a quantity of water into the mouth of the dying man ; and if at his arrival, life is already extinct, the ceremony is performed before the body is consigned to the grave" (*Social History of the Races of Mankind*, Featherman, Div. V., p. 63.) Likewise among the Nubas, as soon as the mortal remains are committed to the earth, vessels filled with water are placed by the side of the grave (*Ibid.*, p. 263).

It certainly seems difficult to believe that even in primitive times, man should have thought that water poured out promiscuously, and at some distance from the grave, could serve the useful purpose of supplying refreshment for the thirsty soul of the dead underneath the ground. But the act of placing food and drink in vessels on the tomb is altogether different, and the modern practice of pouring out the water on the occasion of a death may be a filtered form of this ancient and almost universal custom.

With regard to the fourth possible explanation suggested above, it is only entitled to consideration because it may represent the current interpretation of the custom in rationalistic times, when its real drift had been forgotten for some generations, and it became necessary to invent a pedigree for it.

Inman, in *Ancient Faiths*, etc., I. 85 (quoted by Liebrecht), remarks : "The ancient Egyptians, and the Jewish people to the present day, have the custom of pouring out all the water contained in any vessel in a house where a death has taken place, under the idea that as the living being comes by water, so does it make its exit through water." What this is intended to convey is not quite clear. We know, of course, that the theory of some of the ancients was that man was created from water. But the popular Jewish belief was that God formed the first man of dust gathered from the four corners of the earth, so that in whatever

part of the world it might be his lot to die, no portion of the ground "from whence he was taken" could refuse to receive his remains on the pretence that it had no kinship with him (*Pirqe R. Eliezer*, Chap. xi., etc.) But the probable drift of Inman's explanation is that water, fresh and flowing, represents life; and water, stale and stagnant, typifies death. Or at least, this is the sense in which I interpret his statement.

"Springing water" is symbolical of life. Thus it is designated "living" in Gen. xxvi. 19, Lev. xiv. 5-20, and Song of Songs iv. 15. God is the "fountain of living waters," *i.e.*, the source of life (Jer. ii. 13, xvii. 13). Bileam predicts of Israel: "Waters shall flow from his buckets," *i.e.*, he shall live and flourish (Numb. xxiv. 7). "The righteous is like a tree planted by streams of water," *i.e.*, receiving continual moisture, so that he never ceases from yielding fruit (Jer. xvii. 8; Ps. i. 3). Water cleanses from moral filthiness, *i.e.*, regenerates the soul (Ezek. xxxvi. 25). Thus "springing" (*i.e.*, "living") water is used for the purification of one who has been defiled by contact with the dead (Numb. xix. 17). Likewise, at the ceremonial of cleansing the leper, the birds that were employed had to be killed over running (*i.e.*, living) water (Lev. xiv. 5f; cf. LXX., *i. l.*). And when Aaron and his sons entered the tent of meeting, they had to wash with water that they should not die, since having been previously unclean (in a ritual sense), they required to be purified before approaching the sacred symbols of the fountain of life (Exod. xxx. 20). For "water puts off the deadness; it is one of the means by which we must be born again" (*The Witness of Hermas to the Four Gospels*, C. Taylor, p. 88). "Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven" (John iii. 5). Thus Jesus offers the woman of Samaria "living water" which shall spring up into eternal life (John iv. 10f). And on the day when God's unity and universal sovereignty shall be acknowledged by all man-

kind, living waters shall come forth from the apparently inanimate Jerusalem, after which the holy city shall dwell safely, *i.e.*, have a new lease of life (*Zech. xiv. 8*). Likewise in Ezekiel's dream of the regenerated Jerusalem (*xlvi. 1-12*), perennial waters flow on all sides, nourishing fruit-yielding trees that shall never fail, because the waters issue out of the sanctuary where dwells "the Source of living waters." In this connection it is worthy of record that the ancient Assyrians and Babylonians made "little rivulets by the tombs, through which a constant supply of water could be kept flowing for the spiritual needs of the dead." This represented "the water of life," of which we hear so often in the inscriptions. Pure water was indispensable in all religious ceremonies, and ancient legends recorded that there was a "spring of life" bubbling up beneath the throne of the spirits of the under-world, of which whoever drank would live for ever. It was of this spring that the water which ran in numberless rills through the cities of the dead was a symbol and outward sign" (*Social Life among the Assyrians and Babylonians*, A. H. Sayce, ch. iv.).

On the other hand, the pouring away of water is figuratively equivalent to death. Thus when we die we are "as water (*i.e.*, life) poured out upon the ground, that cannot be gathered up again" (*2 Sam. xiv. 14*; cf. *Targ. in loco*). Job compares a man who dieth and wasteth away to waters failing (*i.e.*, poured out) from the sea (*Job xiv. 11f*). And David poured out the water that the three mighty men had fetched for him in jeopardy of their lives (*2 Sam. xxiii. 16*) as an outward sign of the death they had risked. Again, we are taught that "the blood is the life," therefore it is not to be eaten, but to be poured out on the earth as water (*Deut. xii. 23, 24*; *xv. 23*). "I am poured out like water," exclaims the Psalmist (*Ps. xxii. 15*), *i.e.*, I am drawing near to the end of my life. "Waters flowed over my head; I said, I am cut off," is the metaphor employed in *Lam. iii. 54*. "Pour

out thine heart like water," the poet addresses the daughter of Zion (Lam. ii. 19), *i.e.*, exhaust thy vitality in weeping, that God may take pity upon thy children. Further, when all Israel had assembled to acknowledge their sin in worshipping the Baalim and the Ashtaroth, they poured out water before the Lord, to show that the "old Adam" had passed away (1 Sam. vii. 6). And when an end shall come upon the four corners of the land, "all knees shall be weak (properly "go") as water," *i.e.*, cease to exist (Ezek. xxi. 12).

Thus the pouring-out of the water at a death may be an outward sign of the pouring-out of a human soul before God.

Yet another idea seems to have been extant among the Indians, but I have not found a parallel to it. It is that the sprinkling of water drives away the spirits hovering round the place of burial, just as the Jews believed that the kindling of light in the room of the dead had the effect of causing the demons wandering about to vanish. Thus, in India, "when they have reached the place (of interment) the performer walks three times round the spot with his left side turned towards it, sprinkles water on it with a Samî branch and says (to the imaginary spirits):—

"Go away, disperse, remove from hence;
The fathers have made this place for him,
Yama grants him this resting-place,
Sprinkled with water day and night."

(Rig-Veda, x. 14, 9.)

When it is said that the place is sprinkled with water day and night, this implies that it ought to be thus honoured by the relatives of the dead. (Max Müller, *Anthropological Religion*, p. 245.)

It is a remarkable fact that in Jerusalem, the sanctuary of Jewish tradition, this custom is not in vogue. Thus Joseph Schwarz, writing to his brother from the Holy City in the year 1837, says: "Here they know nothing of the practice of pouring out the water in the house of the dead

or in its vicinity" (*Wissens. Ztschr. f. Jüd. Theol.*, Geiger, 1839, iv. 159).

Besides the custom of which I have written at such length, it is also usual to turn the mirrors towards the wall or to cover them up entirely in the house of the dead (See Taylor, *The Dirge of Coheleth*, JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW, IV. 539). Likewise in parts of Germany, the moment anyone dies, everything of a bright colour or glittering aspect, such as looking-glasses, windows, pictures, and clocks, is veiled in white cloth till after the funeral (Liebrecht, *Zur Volkskunde*, p. 350; H.R., in *Folklore Journal*, vi. p. 77). In parts of Scotland, at a death, the mirrors used to be turned to the wall, or were covered up (*Death and Burial Customs*, Scotland, James F. Frazer, in *Folklore Journal*, iii. p. 281). Notably, in Ross-shire when a death takes place . . . looking-glasses are removed from the apartment in which the death occurs and the body is to be laid out (*Folklore Journal*, vi. p. 263).

Mr. Frazer regards the custom as having arisen from the fear "that the soul projected out of the person in the shape of his reflection in the mirror, might be carried off by the ghost of the departed, which is commonly supposed to linger about the house till the burial" (*The Golden Bough*, i. 146).

Might it not rather be traceable to a fear lest the disembodied spirit, wandering about in search of its former abode, might project itself into the mirror in which it beheld its likeness, and thus be irretrievably injured?

An explanation given by a writer (H. Prahn) in *Ztschr. d. Vereins f. Volkskunde* (I., p. 185) is that, if the looking-glasses in the room of the corpse were not covered up, people would be prone to see the coffin twice (the coffin itself and its counterfeit presentment), and that would betoken a second death in the house during the current year.

In the event of a death taking place on the Sabbath, some of the rites detailed above must not be carried out until the termination of the Day of Rest. These are the

closing of the eyes, the stretching out of the hands and feet, and the covering of the head (*Vide T.B. Shabb.* 30b, 43b, 142b).

The corpse may, however, be washed and anointed on the Sabbath, provided the limbs be not strained out of joint ; the pillow may be moved from under the head, and the body may be laid on sand that it keep the longer from putrefaction ; the jaws may also be tied, not to force them closer, but to prevent them dropping lower (*Mish. Shabb.* xxxiii. 5).

The reason for only a partial observance of the rites connected with the dead on the Sabbath is that they involve a profanation of the Day of Rest, which is only permitted in the case of a *living* person (See *T.B. Shabb.* 151b). Thus we are told that King David having died on the Feast of Weeks, which fell coincidentally with the Sabbath, Solomon asked the Sanhedrin who had come to greet him on his accession (we must pass over the anachronism), whether the corpse might be removed on the Day of Rest. They replied : The Mishna teaches that the corpse may be covered and washed, but no limb dare be moved (*Ruth. Rab.* I. 17). On High Festivals, however, the dead may be cared for as on week days.

On no account is it permitted to leave the corpse alone from the moment death has supervened. The reason assigned by *מעבר יבנ* (112b) is that evil spirits, which are of course incorporeal (cf. *Mid. Tanch.* ed. Buber *Gen.* 6b), and, as such, anxious to effectuate their completeness, which they can only do by becoming incarnate, might avail themselves of the opportunity of entering into the dead body.

How pathetic and refreshing in its natural simplicity is an explanation such as this, which comes to us as an echo from the distant, boundless realms of the primitive imagination.

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(*To be continued.*)